



United States Department of State Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization Operations

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Colleagues and friends:

For many of us, it is hard to imagine how large violence can loom in someone's day-to-day existence. The death of loved ones, the disintegration of a neighborhood, and even the limitations on mobility created by fear of trouble rob a society of the ability to retain its best and brightest. Narratives of dysfunction dominate, and progress is stalled. In every place we work, safety is a top concern.

Determined to stem violence, many citizens and government officials put themselves at risk. CSO exists to help them end the cycle of violence so that they can build a road to a peaceful, promising future. While we see similarities in the dangers from one country to another, there are important differences, and success depends on the ability to design solutions that fit the particulars.

Our engagements, including those in [Kenya](#), [Honduras](#), and [Syria](#), often combine top-down and bottom-up approaches to civilian security in periods of transition or crisis. Many such countries require urgent reforms that are hard to achieve through long-term security assistance and development programs alone. To supplement such efforts, CSO has sought to identify and support initiatives by an engaged civil society that teams up with reform-minded government officials or, as in Syria, with the opposition.

In Kenya, violence triggered by the national elections in 2007 left more than 1,300 Kenyans dead and 660,000 displaced. The United States and other nations wanted to help Kenyans avoid a rerun. Part of the answer, we concluded, was to work in the high-risk Rift Valley, Coast, and Nyanza with citizen coalitions (such as [Champions of Peace](#)), police, religious authorities, and others to build trust and a shared commitment to combating efforts to foment violence. This included a variety of meetings and events at which participants had a chance to get to know each other and shed stereotypes.

As this initiative began to take hold, we assisted with the creation of a communications system that enabled citizens to alert authorities to potential violence. Thanks to the efforts made to strengthen relationships, citizens' warning calls usually generated a police response. Meanwhile, we worked with a range of partners to generate statements -- on radio and elsewhere -- urging a peaceful election. Politicians inclined to stir up violence found the public increasingly intolerant of their efforts, and these "spoilers" and their messages of violence were essentially marginalized.

Did this coordinated approach in Kenya succeed? No one can say for sure which factors were most significant, but authorities believe that 20 people died from election-sparked incidents -- including several policemen slain while protecting polling sites -- a dramatic reduction from the previous election.



We're working with a group formed by Honduran women whose loved ones were killed.

In Honduras, we have supported the Hondurans as they try to reduce one of the world's highest homicide rates. CSO's initiatives bolster the broader U.S. citizen-security engagement through the [Central America Regional Security Initiative](#) (CARSI) and related U.S. programs that seek to prevent violence, dismantle criminal networks, and build institutional capacity in the region to promote the rule of law. We were fortunate to form a partnership with a first-rate local organization, [la Alianza por la Paz y Justicia](#) (Alliance for Peace and Justice, or APJ). Police corruption is a major obstacle to reducing crime, and in 2012 we offered early funding to APJ's campaign to build public support for a purge of corrupt police officers and staff in the attorney general's office. The Alliance worked

with members of the Honduran Congress who called for the resignations, and the Alliance's proposed candidates received favorable consideration in the naming of an "Intervening Commission" in the attorney general's office.

In addition, the Alliance is working with the police and the security ministry to support the drafting of stronger laws and institutional improvements. Honduras' violence and corruption will not end overnight, but the ability of civil society to work with the government on fundamental reform is a hopeful development. Earlier this year, the Alliance launched a creative multimedia campaign called "We Won't Take it Anymore."

In Syria, security challenges are particularly daunting for those who are working to restore public order in liberated areas and trying to rebuild their communities from the devastation of war. As part of CSO's critical role in the U.S. response to the Syrian crisis, we and our partners convened consultations this spring with groups of stakeholders -- including police, judges, lawyers, and civil society representatives from opposition-held areas -- to hear about the challenges facing them so we can best support their efforts to institute viable police forces and judicial systems and establish the rule of law. A subsequent workshop for women opinion-makers also had a strong security focus.

These discussions help inform the integrated community security packages that we are negotiating with the Syrian Opposition Coalition and community stakeholders. Once a community agrees to an accountable plan, CSO will furnish tailored packages that can include training, funds to help local councils establish and support police forces, and non-lethal equipment such as computers and communications gear. This assistance helps bolster the credibility of local councils and facilitates the provision of essential services in areas free of regime or extremist control. More importantly, these efforts will plant the seeds for inclusive administration and pluralistic decision-making in post-transition Syria.

We are dedicated to bringing [innovative approaches to conflict-prevention and response](#) throughout the State Department. We welcome your ideas on how we can help nations beleaguered by conflict. You can write us at CSOpublic@state.gov. We also encourage you to forward our news to people you think would like to join this conversation. Previous dispatches are found [here](#). You can find us at [@StateCSO](#) or www.facebook.com/StateCSO.

Best,

Ambassador Rick Barton
Assistant Secretary for Conflict and Stabilization Operations

P.S.: We are studying how we might help Nigerians in the Niger Delta counter the threat of increasing violence heading into the 2015 elections. Our exploratory team has just returned, and you will be hearing more about our ideas in a future letter.

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